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AUTHOR Bell, T. H.
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ABSTRACT

In 1969 the Census Bureau carried out a study that found that nearly 85 percent of the participants in all kinds of adult education had successfully completed high school or a higher level of education. The study further showed that the more schooling an adult had completed, the more likely he or she would be to pursue some kind of further education. A study, in progress for more than three years, has been examining the question of what is a minimally effective core education for adults. The study has established adult proficiency levels based on real life situations, and has shown that one out of five American adults, an estimated 15 to 20 million, today lack the basic skills required to sustain themselves and their families. To find ways of reaching these adults and convincing them that they can take hold of their own destinies, and then delivering on that promise, is a mission of the highest order in education. A plan for life-long learning should help adults find meaning and fulfillment in their living, provide them with the skills to be productive and independent, and increase their capacity to function as parents with love, hope, and guidance for their children. (Author)

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OUR SCHOOLS AND LIFELONG LEARNING *

T. H. BELL

U.S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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I'M VERY HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS CONFERENCE TODAY.

I UNDERSTAND THAT, ALTHOUGH THIS IS THE FOURTH AFT-QuEST CONSORTIUM, IT IS THE FIRST TO ADDRESS A SPECIFIC THEME IN EDUCATION. I DON'T BELIEVE YOU CAN BE ACCUSED OF CHOOSING AN OVERLY NARROW THEME. "UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING" CERTAINLY GIVES ADEQUATE LEEWAY FOR THE MOST DISCURSIVE EDUCATOR.

I WILL TRY TO AVOID SOME OF THE TEMPTING SPECULATIONS SUCH A THEME INVITES AND DEAL WITH WHAT I PERCEIVE TO BE SOME PRESSING REALITIES HERE AND NOW.

AS YOU MAY KNOW, I AM A PERSISTENT ADVOCATE OF GREATER ATTENTION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT. I AM ALSO IMPATIENT TO SEE THE NATION'S EDUCATION RESOURCES PUT MORE EFFECTIVELY AT THE DISPOSAL OF ADULTS.

BUT, TO PUT WHAT FOLLOWS INTO PERSPECTIVE, I WANT TO SUBMIT ONE THING AT THE OUTSET OF THIS DISCUSSION. THAT IS THAT NOTHING WE DO IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT OR IN ADULT EDUCATION WILL HAVE AS MUCH EFFECT ON LIFELONG LEARNING AS WHAT WE ARE NOW DOING, OR CAN DO, IN THE 12 OR SO YEARS THAT WE REQUIRE CHILDREN TO ATTEND ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL.

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I MAKE THIS STATEMENT SOMEWHAT DOGMATICALLY BECAUSE THE STATISTICS ARE COMPELLING . . .

IN 1969 THE CENSUS BUREAU CARRIED OUT A STUDY FOR THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION. IT FOUND THAT NEARLY 85 PERCENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN ALL KINDS OF ADULT EDUCATION HAD SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL OR A HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION.

THE STUDY FURTHER SHOWED THAT, THE MORE SCHOOLING AN ADULT HAD COMPLETED, THE MORE LIKELY HE OR SHE WOULD BE TO PURSUE SOME KIND OF FURTHER EDUCATION. THIS DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEN, AS NOW, THERE WERE SIGNIFICANT GOVERNMENT SPONSORED PROGRAMS OF ADULT EDUCATION SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO LOCATE AND ASSIST ADULTS WHOSE EDUCATION HAD STOPPED SHORT OF HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION.

A REPEAT OF THIS STUDY IN 1972 IS NOW BEING PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION. IT SHOWS THAT AN EVEN HIGHER PERCENTAGE, NEARLY 87 PERCENT, OF PARTICIPANTS IN ADULT EDUCATION HAD COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL. IT PRESENTED EVEN STRONGER EVIDENCE THAT, THE MORE YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED, THE MORE LIKELY A PERSON WILL BE TO PURSUE FURTHER STUDY.

PERHAPS I AM BELABORING THE OBVIOUS. I'M SURE NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN TEACHERS THAT SCHOOL CAN DEVELOP IN SOME STUDENTS A TASTE FOR LEARNING AND A SKILL AT PURSUING HIS OR HER OWN INTERESTS WHICH WILL LAST A LIFETIME. THAT IS THE GOAL OF ALL WE DO.

I SIMPLY WISH TO EMPHASIZE, AS WE DISCUSS LIFELONG LEARNING, THAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A CONTINUUM OF EXPERIENCE IN WHICH, FOR ESSENTIALLY ALL AMERICANS, THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE THE VITAL CORE.

IT IS QUITE REASONABLE TO ASK AT THIS TIME, WHEN SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS ARE SHRINKING, SCHOOLS ARE BEING CLOSED, AND TEACHERS ARE BEING LAID OFF, WHETHER THESE SCHOOLS CANNOT SERVE THE GROWING DEMAND FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING BY THE POST-SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION.

THE GROWTH IN DEMAND IS SHOWN QUITE CLEARLY IN THE SURVEYS OF PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION TO WHICH I REFERRED EARLIER. BETWEEN 1969 AND 1972 THERE WAS A 20.7-PERCENT INCREASE IN ADULT EDUCATION PARTICIPATION WHILE THE POPULATION OVER 16 YEARS OLD, LESS THOSE ATTENDING SCHOOL FULL TIME, INCREASED ONLY 6.3 PERCENT.

ONE VERY INTERESTING COMPONENT OF THIS INCREASE IS THE SHARPLY INCREASED PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN. BETWEEN 1969 AND 1972 ENROLLMENT OF WOMEN INCREASED 28.1 PERCENT, TWICE AS MUCH AS THE NUMBER OF MEN. IN FACT, IN 1972, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WOMEN MADE UP MORE THAN HALF OF THE ADULT EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS. OF THE ESTIMATED 8 MILLION WOMEN, 57 PERCENT HAD A JOB.

THE BIG INSTITUTIONAL FACTOR IN THE GROWTH OF ADULT EDUCATION BETWEEN 1969 AND 1972 WAS THE 2-YEAR COLLEGE OR INSTITUTE. WOMEN INCREASED THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS OFFERED BY SUCH SCHOOLS BY ALMOST 90 PERCENT IN THAT PERIOD AND MEN BY 46 PERCENT.

THE SURVEY REPORTS PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS OFFERED THROUGH MANY KINDS OF SPONSORS. BESIDES COMMUNITY COLLEGES THE INSTITUTIONS OFFERING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS INCLUDE THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, PRIVATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS, FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES, EMPLOYERS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS OR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS.

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTES ARE THE SPONSORS OF MORE THAN HALF THE ADULT EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN THE NATION. FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, ACCOUNT FOR ANOTHER QUARTER. IN 1972 LABOR ORGANIZATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS WERE IDENTIFIED AS SPONSORS OF ABOUT 6 PERCENT OF THE ADULT LEARNING ACTIVITIES REPORTED.

SEVERAL FACTORS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROWTH OF ADULT LEARNING ACTIVITIES. NOT THE LEAST IS THE PHENOMENON WE ARE STILL CALLING THE POST WAR BABY BOOM. PART OF THAT GROUP THAT BURST THE SEAMS OF OUR SCHOOLS DURING THE SIXTIES IS NOW SWELLING THE YOUNG ADULT GROUP, THE GROUP THAT MAKES THE MOST USE OF ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES. IT WILL BE SOME YEARS BEFORE THIS TRANSITION IS COMPLETED.

THE AVAILABILITY OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS TO PAY FOR ADULT EDUCATION IS NOT A GREAT FACTOR IN ADULT EDUCATION PARTICIPATION. IN THE 1972 SURVEY 55 PERCENT OF THE SAMPLE REPORTED THEY WERE PAYING FOR THEIR OWN COURSES AND 26 PERCENT THAT THEIR EMPLOYER WAS PAYING FOR THEM. PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS WERE PAYING FOR 7 PERCENT.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS COVERED THE COST FOR ONLY 18 PERCENT, BUT THIS DOES NOT COUNT THE SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC FUNDS INVOLVED IN PROVIDING FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS THROUGH THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

AT PRESENT THERE IS A CLEARLY DISCERNIBLE FEDERAL POLICY TOWARD ADULT LEARNING EVEN THOUGH THE VARIOUS PROGRAMS AND SOURCES OF FUNDS ARE SCATTERED THROUGH MANY AGENCIES. MOST FEDERAL AID TO ADULT EDUCATION IS AIMED AT HELPING ADULTS WHOSE LACK OF EDUCATION CONSTITUTES A REAL DISADVANTAGE IN OUR SOCIETY; AT PROVIDING THESE PEOPLE WITH THE BASIC

SKILLS THEY MUST HAVE SIMPLY TO GET ALONG -- TO GET A JOB THAT PAYS A LIVING WAGE, OR TO RUN A HOME.

IT IS SOBERING TO REFLECT, AS WE PONDER SUCH A SPARKLING PROSPECT AS UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING, THAT AN ESTIMATED 15 TO 20 MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS TODAY ARE LACKING IN THE SIMPLE, BASIC SKILLS REQUIRED TO SUSTAIN THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES OR EVEN TO BE AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ASSISTANCE THEIR COMMUNITIES OFFER. ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING PROSPECTS OF UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING IS THE CHALLENGE AND THE PROMISE PRESENTED BY THIS GROUP OF ADULTS, NEARLY ALL OF WHOM COULD NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ADULT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES BEING OFFERED TODAY. TO FIND WAYS OF REACHING THESE ADULTS AND CONVINCING THEM THAT THEY CAN TAKE HOLD OF THEIR OWN DESTINIES, AND THEN DELIVERING ON THAT PROMISE, IS A MISSION OF THE HIGHEST ORDER IN EDUCATION.

THE ADULT EDUCATION ACT, AS AMENDED LAST YEAR, AUTHORIZES FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO OFFER ADULT EDUCATION OF SUBJECT MATTER UP TO THE COLLEGE LEVEL. THIS IS RATHER BELATED RECOGNITION THAT THE EQUIVALENT OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA IS ALMOST THE MINIMUM LEVEL OF EDUCATION A PERSON NEEDS TO MAKE IT IN EVEN A SMALL WAY IN OUR SOCIETY.

BUT THERE IS NO FEDERAL ABHORRENCE OF THE IDEA OF LIFELONG LEARNING. THE EDUCATION PROGRAM OFFERED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, FOR EXAMPLE -- RANGING FROM HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY EDUCATION TO POSTGRADUATE STUDIES -- SEEMS ALMOST THE IDEAL OF LIFELONG LEARNING. VARIOUS OTHER PROGRAMS ALLOW FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AT ALL LEVELS TO TAKE TIME OFF WITH PAY TO UNDERTAKE JOB-RELATED STUDIES. THE OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING COURSES OFFERED UNDER THE

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM OF THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION GO FROM THOSE FOR ENTRY LEVEL JOBS ON UP TO QUITE SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGICAL TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WELL ALONG IN THEIR CAREER.

HOWEVER, THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUITY DICTATES THAT THE BULK OF AID NOW AVAILABLE MUST GO TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST. OUR ASSESSMENT TODAY IS THAT WE MUST IN THE MAIN SERVE THOSE ADULTS WHOSE EDUCATION IS NOT UP TO THE NEEDS OF FULL AND FUNCTIONING CITIZENSHIP.

WE MAY SHORTLY HAVE A MORE USEFUL MEASURE OF JUST WHAT THIS EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IS. A PROJECT SPONSORED BY THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HAS BEEN EXAMINING FOR MORE THAN 3 YEARS THE QUESTION OF WHAT IS A MINIMALLY EFFECTIVE CORE EDUCATION FOR ADULTS.

INSTEAD OF ESTABLISHING STANDARDS OF KNOWLEDGE, THIS STUDY ESTABLISHES LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY IN LIVING, AND THEN DETERMINES HOW MUCH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL PEOPLE AT THE VARIOUS LEVELS ACTUALLY HAVE.

ROUGHLY SPEAKING, THE LEVELS MIGHT BE CALLED "MOVING AHEAD," "MAKING IT," AND "NOT MAKING IT."

IN THE LAST CATEGORY WOULD BE PEOPLE WHOSE SKILLS ARE THE EQUIVALENT OF THOSE WHO WORK IN UNSKILLED, UNDERPAID JOBS, OR WHO ARE NOT WORKING AT ALL. IN THE MIDDLE LEVEL ARE THE SKILLS OF A PERSON WHO IS EARNING A LIVING. AT THE TOP IS THE SKILL LEVEL OF THE PERSON WHO IS IMPROVING HIS OR HER POSITION AND LOOKING FORWARD TO INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES.

THE STUDY ESTABLISHES ADULT PROFICIENCY LEVELS BASED ON REAL LIFE SITUATIONS. IN AN INTERVIEW SITUATION IT MEASURES SIX BASIC SKILLS AND FIVE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AREAS. THE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE AREAS ASSESSED ARE OCCUPATION RELATED KNOWLEDGE, CONSUMER ECONOMICS, HEALTH, COMMUNITY RESOURCES, AND GOVERNMENT AND LAW. THE BASIC SKILLS ARE READING, WRITING, SPEAKING AND LISTENING, COMPUTATION, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS. ALL THE ITEMS IN THE TEST ARE REAL TASKS OR SITUATIONS FACED BY ALL OF US ON A MORE OR LESS DAILY BASIS.

BASED ON A NATIONWIDE SAMPLE THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY INDICATE THAT ONE AMERICAN ADULT OUT OF FIVE CANNOT DO A NUMBER OF THINGS, WHICH MOST OF US WOULD TAKE FOR GRANTED, THAT ANYONE WHO HAS GROWN UP IN THE U.S. WOULD CERTAINLY BE ABLE TO DO, SUCH AS ADD UP A BILL OR FOLLOW SIMPLE PRINTED DIRECTIONS. THESE SAME AMERICANS ARE QUITE VAGUE ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND LAW EVEN IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES. IN SHORT, THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO ACCEPT CONDITIONS AS THEY FIND THEM. AND THE CORROLARY, OF COURSE, IS THAT THE CONDITIONS THEY MUST ACCEPT ARE BAD. THE SURVEY PROVIDES ONE MORE ITEM OF EVIDENCE THAT THE UNDEREDUCATED ARE THE UNDERPAID.

NOT ONLY IS THIS A FIFTH OF OUR ADULT POPULATION BEARING AN UNFAIR SHARE OF SUFFERING, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND FRUSTRATION; WE MUST ALSO CONCLUDE THAT THIS SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION CANNOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL STRENGTH OF THE NATION. OUR DEMOCRACY SIMPLY IS NOT FUNCTIONING IF ANY SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION IS BEING LEFT OUT.

ALTHOUGH THIS STUDY IS NOT YET COMPLETED, IT PROMISES NOT ONLY A BETTER BASIS FOR DETERMINING WHEN AN ADULT HAS ACQUIRED THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL REQUIRED TO FUNCTION, BUT ALSO NEW CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING WHEN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM IS PERFORMING ADEQUATELY.

WHILE I REALIZE THAT THE FEDERAL MISSION IN ADULT EDUCATION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE FOCUSED ON THE EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED ADULT FOR THE MOST PART FOR SOME TIME TO COME, I AM NOT GOING TO DENY MYSELF THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR A LITTLE SPECULATION ABOUT WHAT LIFELONG LEARNING MIGHT BE.

IT IS MY OPINION, WHICH I HAVE EXPRESSED OFTEN AND AT SOME LENGTH, THAT NO ADULT GROUP IS IN MORE NEED OF ASSISTANCE WITH EDUCATION THAN THE YOUNG COUPLE STARTING TO RAISE A FAMILY. I HAVE PROPOSED THAT EVERY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRY BECOME A COMPREHENSIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR ITS NEIGHBORHOOD.

HERE, IN ADDITION TO CONTACTING THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES NEW PARENTS NEED, THEY COULD LEARN SYSTEMATICALLY HOW TO NURTURE THEIR CHILD'S ABILITY TO LEARN AND ENHANCE THE APPRECIATION OF LIFE AND THE WORLD. CHILDREN BENEFITTING FROM SUCH A PROGRAM COULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE PREDICTED TO PERFORM BETTER IN SCHOOL AND ENJOY IT MORE. AN IMPORTANT DIVIDEND WOULD BE THAT MANY PARENTS WOULD ENJOY THEIR CHILDREN MORE.

MORE GENERALLY I SEE UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE CONVICTION THAT LIFE IS FASCINATING, AND THAT IT GROWS MORE INTERESTING THE MORE ONE LEARNS AND EXPERIENCES. I THINK THIS MUST BE FELT BY ALL OF US, NO MATTER HOW LIMITED AND PRACTICAL A SUBJECT WE MAY

BE CONCERNED WITH. WE SHOULD BE AWARE THAT ANY LEARNING EXPERIENCE IS A STEP TOWARD THE NEXT AND THAT THE PROCESS IS ENDLESS.

SO I WOULD ESTABLISH AS THE FIRST OBJECTIVE OF A PLAN FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING THAT IT HELP ADULTS FIND MEANING AND FULFILLMENT IN THEIR LIVING. SECOND, THAT IT SHOULD PROVIDE THEM WITH THE SKILLS TO BE PRODUCTIVE AND INDEPENDENT. AND THIRD, THAT IT SHOULD INCREASE THEIR CAPACITY TO FUNCTION AS PARENTS WITH LOVE, HOPE, AND GUIDANCE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

I BELIEVE THIS THIRD POINT SHOULD BE GIVEN SPECIAL ATTENTION IN THESE TIMES. WE CONTINUE TO ACCUMULATE EVIDENCE THAT THE HOME IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR DETERMINING THE HAPPINESS, SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND SUCCESS OF A CHILD; THAT NO INSTITUTION CAN SUBSTITUTE OR COMPENSATE FOR THE HOME EXPERIENCE. I BELIEVE IT IS TIME EDUCATORS RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOME IN EDUCATION AND SOUGHT WAYS TO INVOLVE PARENTS DIRECTLY IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN, NOT ONLY IN THE EARLY YEARS BUT THROUGHOUT SCHOOL.

AS A LAST POINT, I BELIEVE ONE PROSPECT OF UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING HAS A PARTICULAR PROMISE FOR OUR NATION -- THE PROSPECT OF A POPULATION IN WHICH MANY ARE STUDYING THE WORKINGS OF GOVERNMENT AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIETY, LEARNING MORE AND DEMANDING MORE OF THEIR ELECTED GOVERNMENT. TO ME, THAT WOULD BE OUR GREATEST GUARANTEE OF CONTINUED FREEDOM AND SOCIAL PROGRESS.

WHILE I WILL BE AN UNSWERVING SUPPORTER OF CONDUCTING ADULT EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FORTUNATELY THE ADULT EDUCATION FIELD

NOW INCLUDES A WIDE VARIETY OF INSTITUTIONS AND OFFERINGS IN RESPONSE TO THE VARIED DEMANDS OF THE PUBLIC.

NOT ALL SUCH ACTIVITIES CAN BE JUDGED SOLELY ON EDUCATIONAL CRITERIA, FOR THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE ADULT LEARNER HAS MUCH MORE COMPLEX REASONS FOR PURSUING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAN TO ATTAIN A BETTER JOB OR A DEGREE, OR EVEN TO IMPROVE HIS OR HER MIND. NOT THE LEAST OF THESE IS SOCIAL CONTACT SOMETIMES TRAGICALLY LACKING IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY. ADULT EDUCATION OFFERINGS ARE ALREADY A VITAL SPARK IN MANY COMMUNITIES, AND WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE ALL OF THEM TO GROW. THEN WE MAY BE ON OUR WAY TOWARD SOMETHING WE CAN CALL UNIVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING.

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